

NEW PUBLIC HEALTH THREATS

demand alertness and responsiveness



Spraying for adult mosquitos

West Nile Virus

In order to reduce the number of people that would become sick or die from West Nile Virus (WNV), the Health Department led a comprehensive, community-wide WNV prevention campaign. People were encouraged to avoid being outside during dusk and dawn, to wear long sleeves and pants, and to use repellent. Businesses, landowners and the public were encouraged to eliminate standing water and treat water with larvicide to kill mosquitos before they became adults. The most visible part of the over all effort was the spraying for adult mosquitos by Public Works and Parks and Recreation staff. This multi-faceted approach was credited with significantly reducing the number of people that contracted WNV this summer. Even with these efforts, 110 people were diagnosed with WNV. This is the highest number of cases of any vector borne disease ever recorded in Lancaster County.



Metropolitan Medical Response System

The Lincoln Metropolitan Medical Response System (MMRS) is a community-wide effort involving a vast array of local agencies and health care providers aimed at improving our medical response to a weapon of mass destruction event or other catastrophic event. Since 2001, the Lincoln MMRS worked to develop an effective and efficient response for the citizens of Lincoln and Lancaster County. During 2003, MMRS purchased and deployed decontamination systems and personal protection equipment. In conjunction with State planning, MMRS has completed and tested a plan to vaccinate everyone in Lancaster County in four days, if needed. The Lincoln-Lancaster County Health Department now has a stockpile of antibiotics for use in a public health emergency, MMRS partners, at no cost to the City or County, will replace the stockpile, as necessary. During 2004, the Lincoln MMRS will continue to strengthen our community's capabilities and capacities to respond to the human health consequences of a catastrophic public health emergency.



Decontamination tent unveiling

Mass Clinic Exercise

Emergency Response

In a time when terrorist use biological and chemical weapons, public health professionals must be ready to work closely with other first responders, such as fire and police. LLCHD has quickly increased our community's level of preparedness by training additional staff in emergency response to biological, chemical, radiological/nuclear and mass trauma events. This training is equally useful for LLCHD's participation in handling over 200 emergency responses to accidental spills or illegal dumping of hazardous materials, methamphetamine labs, and vehicle accidents.

Some of the training courses attended:

- U.S. Dept of Defense Weapons of Mass Destruction COBRA (Chemical, Ordnance, Biological, Radiological) courses
- Biowarfare & Bioterrorism – U.S. Centers for Disease Control & DOD
- Chemical Threat Agents – U.S. Dept. of Justice
- Air Monitoring & Hazardous Materials Sampling – US EPA
- Nuclear Fuel Emergency Response & Radiological and Nuclear Operations and Testing – U.S. Department of Energy and Transportation
- HAZWOPER (Hazardous Operations) – OSHA
- Threat and Risk Assessment – Department of Homeland Security



Emerging Infectious Diseases

Emerging infectious diseases demanded reallocation of scarce public health resources to fight off West Nile Virus, prepare for the potential for a terrorist attack using Small Pox virus, planning for a possible case of SARS, and dealing with a most unusual outbreak of pneumonic Tularemia. While SARS gained national headlines and demanded local planning for what to do if a case showed up locally, local health department staff were also working hard to get first line responders, doctors and nurses vaccinated against Small Pox. And if it wasn't Small Pox, it was the spread of Monkey Pox from prairie dogs to people, adding an entirely new disease to the Western Hemisphere. A small local outbreak (three cases) of pneumonic Tularemia in lawn care workers led a team of physicians from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control to Lincoln to assist LLCHD and the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services in determining the main factors in this highly unusual occurrence and assess the risk of this disease spreading into the general population. Such occurrences have almost become the norm in the past ten years, and these situations severely stretch local public health resources.

